

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8587
INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL KADUNA
AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 6475

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, NI, BE, FR, CG
SUZJECT: NIGERIAN REACTION TO THE WESTERN INTERVENTION IN ZAIRE

REF: LAGOS 6280

1. SUMMARY. ALTHOUGH FMG LEADERS WERE PROBABLY NOT PLEASED BY THE AIRLIFT OF FRENCH AND BELGIAN TROOPS TO SHABA PROVINCE, THE FMG HAS MADE NO PUBLIC STATEMENT REGARDING EITHER THE ATTACK ON KOLWEZI OR THE AIRLIFT OPERATION. OFFICIALS OF THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS HAVE ALSO AVOIDED PRIVATE COMMENT ON THE SUBJECT. THE SPARSE PRESS COMMENT WHICH HAS APPEARED TO DATE HAS BEEN CRITICAL OF THE WESTERN INTERVENTION. END SUMMARY.

2. THE STRONGEST CRITICISM SO FAR OF THE WESTERN OPERATION APPEARED IN A MAY 24 EDITORIAL IN THE GOVERNMENT-OWNED DAILY TIMES (DT). IN A COMMENT ENTITLED "HEART OF DARKNESS OR SILLY ALIBI?", THE DT CALLS MOBUTU "AN UNCANNILY LUCKY MAN" AND GOES ON TO ADD: "HIS VENALITY IS NOW
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PROVERBIAL. HIS ADMINISTRATIVE INEPTITUDE HAS TURNED WHAT ONCE WAS ONE OF AFRICA'S MOST PROMISING NATIONS INTO A FIEFDOM OF APATHETIC CITIZENS MOSTLY. HE PRESIDES OVER AN ECONOMY ALMOST ENTIRELY MORTAGGED TO FOREIGN INTERESTS. HIS ARMY HAS BEEN SO DECIMATED IT CANNOT QUELL EVEN A MEDIUM-SIZED RIOT."

3. THE DT ADDS, HOWEVER, THAT EACH PEOPLE HAS THE RIGHT TO DECIDE FOR ITSELF HOW TO REMEDY SUCH A SITUATION. THUS, ACCORDING TO THE DT, "IT IS PRECISELY FOR THIS REASON THAT WE FIND THE INTERVENTION IN ZAIRE OF FOREIGN POWERS, AND IN PARTICULAR OF FRANCE AND BELGIUM, ESPECIALLY NAUSEATING."

4. THE DT CONTINUES: "FOR EVEN CONCEDING THAT PRESIDENT MOBUTU, TRAGIC AS HIS PRESIDENCY HAS BEEN, WAS ENTITLED TO INVITE THESE COUNTRIES TO DO HIS DIRTY WORK FOR HIM, IT IS STILL AMAZING HOW MUCH OF THE WESTERN PRESS HAS MANAGED TO TRANSFORM THE DEATH IN KOLWEZI OF 30 EUROPEANS INTO A RACIAL WAR AND, BY EXTENSION, INTO A SYMBOLIC STRUGGLE BETWEEN GOOD (WHITE) AND EVIL (BLACK). DURING THE LAST TWO WEEKS, THE PURPORTED MASSACRE OF WHITE "INNOCENTS" IN KOLWEZI HAS SO AGITATED THE CHANCERIES OF THE WESTERN WORLD THAT THE INATTENTIVE MIGHT HAVE SUPPOSED THAT 400 FORMER GENDARMES, ARMED WITH OBSOLETE WEAPONS, WERE HOLDING THE ENTIRE FRNECH ARMY TO RANSOM."

5. ON A POSSIBLE CUBAN INVOLVEMENT, THE DT OBSERVES, "FEAR OF THE CUBAN BOGEY DID NOT WORK THIS TIME. THERE WERE NO BEARDED CUBAN SOLDIERS IN KOLWEZI AND NOT EVEN THE AMERICANS COULD CONJURE SOME UP." THE TIMES CONCLUDES: "WE NEED FIRST TO SET OUR OWN HOUSES IN ORDER BY ENSURING THAT THE MOBUTUS OF THE CONTINENT ARE GIVEN AS SHORT A SHRIFT AS POSSIBLE. AND MEANWHILE, WE CAN ONLY SHARE CONFIDENTIAL

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THE AGONY OF THE HARASSED PEOPLE OF ZAIRE."

6. THE DT ISSUE CARRIES TWO ADDITIONAL BY-LINED COMMENTARIES, ONE GENERALLY CRITICAL OF THE WESTERN INTERVENTION AND THE OTHER MORE AMBIVALENT, MENTIONING THE ISSUE ONLY IN PASSING.

7. THE FMG HAS GIVEN NO INDICATION AS YET OF ITS VIEWS REGARDING THE ATTACK ON KOLWEZI OR THE WESTERN AIRLIFT OPERATION. IT HAS NOT RESPONDED TO THE REQUEST FOR ITS VIEWS MADE BY THE DCM OF THIS EMBASSY ON MAY 19 "(REFTTEL). A NUMBER OF AMBASSADORS IN LAGOS HAVE ALSO REPORTED TO US THEIR INABILITY TO ASCERTAIN THE FMG'S VIEWS ON THE SUBJECT. THE ZAIRE AMBASSADOR GOT A POLITE BUT FIRM BRUSH-OFF WHEN HE REQUESTED AN FMG STATEMENT OF SUPPORT. THE EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR HAS INFORMED US THAT AFRICA DEPARTMENT DEPUTY DIRECTOR FAFOWARA TOLD HIM SEVERAL DAYS AGO THAT THE FMG WAS ISSUING A STATEMENT CRITICIZING THE AIRLIFT OPERATION. NO SUCH STATEMENT HAS IN FACT APPEARED, HOWEVER, AND IT APPEARS THAT THE FMG HAD SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT EXPRESSING ITS VIEWS PUBLICLY.

8. COMMENT: THIS IS A TOUGH ONE FOR THE FMG TO CALL. MANY OF ITS LEADERS PROBABLY SEE THE AIRLIFT OPERATION AS A NEOCOLONIAL MILITARY OPERATION IN WHICH WHITE TROOPS WERE USED TO PROP UP A CORRUPT BLACK DICTATORSHIP. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE FMG IS NORMALLY SYMPATHETIC TO ARGUMENTS CONCERNING THE INVIOABILITY OF AFRICAN FRONTIERS AND THE POSSIBLE DISMEMBERMENT OF AN AFRICAN STATE. THE FACT THAT MOBUTU IS SCHEDULED TO VISIT LAGOS IN JUNE MAY ALSO HAVE AFFECTED THE POSTURE OF THE FMG, AS WELL AS A RELUCTANCE TO PUBLICLY CRITICIZE AN ACTION SUPPORTED BY MANY FRANCOPHONE STATES IN AFRICA AS WELL AS THE US.
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